DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 236 106 SO 015 153

AUTHOR Peters, Helene
TITLE Feminist Theory and Feminist Pedagogy: The Existential Woman.
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the National Women's Studies Association Conference (Columbus, OH, June 26-30, 1983).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Curriculum Enrichment; Curriculum Problems; *Existentialism; *Feminism; Higher Education; Models; *Womens Studies

ABSTRACT

Feminist pedagogy necessitates development of an educational framework that posits woman as an essential member of the community. Existential philosophy, with its themes of freedom, choice and decision, and alienation between beings, furnishes the best theoretical base for the new paradigm. Unlike the pervasive androcentric model, this philosophy recognizes woman as a being in control of her social role. Because woman's sexuality is a matter of situation rather than nature, any involvement becomes possible for her. Existential philosophy lends itself to the restructuring of many courses, for example, the study of roles in anthropology, biographies in literature, and social rather than political history. The existential idea of choice provides a starting point for explorations of sexual preference, social deviation, and the family. Certain teaching methods, such as oral presentations, class discussions, and student-teacher conferences, are particularly suited to an existential approach to women's issues. The application of this perspective to all disciplines offers students and teachers a new understanding of humankind in the duality of woman and man. (LP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Helene Peters
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED236106

FEMINIST THEORY AND FEMINIST PEDAGOGY:

THE EXISTENTIAL WOMAN

1983

Hélène PETERS

French Department
Macalester College
St. Paul, MN 55105

DRAFT: Not for reproduction.

50 018 153

Hélène Peters
French Department
Macalester College
St. Paul, MN 55105

June, 1983

FEMINIST THEORY AND FEMINIST PEDAGOGY: THE EXISTENTIAL WOMAN

Paper presented at the National Women's Studies Association Annual Convention, Ohio State University, June 27, 1983

What I propose to present here is a model for the structure of a type of course that would address itself to students, women and men alike, in search of philosophical guidelines which concern themselves with women's issues. This presentation is an attempt to outline a feminist pedagory based on a certain paradigm, or more precisely on a set of paradigms that will help us and our students understand humankind in the duality of Woman and Man.

As Yvette Oldendorf explains in her notes on: "Exercise in Questioning: Androcentrism and Academia" (Macalester, Spring 1983), that duality has long been implicitly founded on the acknowledgement of "Male superior to Female" and has moved beyond descriptive to prescriptive. Such is the paradigm of androcentrism. Androcentrism is the organization of thinking around data of male origin, reflecting that all that counts proceeds from male activity, while somewhere else bustles the female, immaterial, unimportant, non-consequential world: a world of repeated tasks, busy chores, with its own talk, its rituals, jealously and proudly kept, frequently perpetuated and safe-guarded by women themselves: queen bees, matrons. This world ranks low in the hierarchy of the universe, removed from the spheres of pure thought, power, decision, and instructed to getting things done after the mission has been set. The mission being at the apex of the pyramid of life where reality

is defined; through it, the plan is made law and women assigned the reality of the oughts, the shoulds, the hows, the whos.

In brief, woman is the "other" with separate characteristics and functions, operating in a non-essential reality.

Human consciousnesses have been shaped around a paradigm which has, in turn, shaped what we observe, what we define as data, how we are perceived, how we perceive reality. Marilyn Ferguson, in The Aquarian Conspiracy, defines a paradigm as "a framework of thought (from the Greek "paradigma," pattern) ... a scheme for understanding and explaining certain aspects of reality."

Academics, educators, pedagogues, counselors, function and teach with sets of paradigms arising from their particular discipline and their individual training. These dictate what data are used, what universe is defined for investigation and what methodologies are legitimate. These paradigms delimit the questions that are raised. We must target those paradigms if we want to accomplish anything of significance in education.

PART I

The road is bristling with obstacles. The pedagogy of women's studies faces two major problems: How do you reach out to a broad audience of students, beyond the converts, the fervents, the adepts and establish a dialogue with the public at large, beyond the inbred group? How do you move and appeal to more minds in the process of shaping their opinions, minds which are receptive, open and on the sharp edge of scholarly inquiry?

There is some peril in isolating oneself in a corner, be it in a large institution which has the staff and the student interest to form a sizeable nucleus, or in a smaller school where a few dedicated individuals fight the odds, are often respected, but kept at arm's length for various reasons, the main one being that by and large we are dealing with hidden fears, deep-rooted habits, peer pressures.

The forces that stand in the way are many; most are identified, though some are hard to track down. We are talking about attitudes of diffidence, even distrust, towards what appears "trendy," what tampers with academic integrity (dubious scholarship, intellectual biases, an axe to grind); attitudes of "who me?": either a) my discipline has no room for feminism or women's issues (a familiar ring in biology, math, et al.) or b) my discipline is perfectly objective in matters of sex and gender; attitudes dictated by so-called administrative concerns: a) we are understaffed, b) there is so much we already have to teach and we barely cover all bases, c) the attitude of what is appropriate or inappropriate.

The long tradition of androcentric data weighs on many disciplines. Items:

a) History, where chronological and political history has dealt with the great actions of male power holders, conquerors, or conquistadors, explorers, invaders, emperors, ayatollahs, et al. Women were those who stayed home and wept a lot.

b) Literature has glossed over the writings of women, mainly diaries, letters, and a lot of poetry.

c) Philosophy has been dominated by the thought of men operating in a male-structured world of ideas.

d) A choice illustration can be taken from anthropology (incidentally, from the Greek "anthropos" for man, as opposed to "gyne," woman) as presented by Anne Sutherland (Macalester, Spring 1983), where the claim to study the culture and social organization of all human societies has been marred by the practice, until the last five years, of focusing on male-originated data. For example, the classic and seminal work on "primitive money systems" (which are very like systems of rationing) was carried out by Marshall in the Rossell Islands. Marshall developed a theory of the origins of money which was based on an analysis of 22 kinds of money used only by men. In a footnote to his book, he mentions that women also have 22 kinds of money that they use in their own markets to sell their own products. The validity of Marshall's theory is now questionable because exactly one-half of the Rossell Island economic system was ignored. The introduction of Western money under a colonial system has changed this society radically; therefore, the overlooked data is now irretrievable.

These examples mandate us to seek an educational framework that combines the benchmarks of quality and feminist exigencies. Of extant philosophical systems, which furnishes the best organizational base for education practice? This question is vital for an educational philosopher, and it seemingly should be of first importance for an educational practitioner. Chesterton, when asked whether it is important for a landlady to know a prospective tenant's philosophy of life, countered with the question, "Is anything else important?"

What does this mean? Specifically, to identify the philosophy that emphasizes or stresses the subjective perception of reality as central to its system. A philosophy which admits that reality is perceived by

individual subjects in a unique and varied manner. A philosophy with, at its center, a notion of freedom involving the individual in the pursuit of a project she/he has chosen. A philosophy that probes the notions of choice and responsibility as corollaries to freedom. A philosophy that goes beyond the awesome loneliness of the individual into the ever-present partnership with the Other and others.

Several have recognized here the cornerstone of existential philosophy and its major tenets.

Why is the existential posture ideally suited to feminist pedagogy and why does it provide the outlooks, the guidelines for both a sound curricular approach and teaching practices which enrich the personal lives of our students? Why does it lend itself to a format relevant at the same time to a syllabus and to the solving of personal identity crises?

First, a brief background. By existentialism, we refer to a movement seated in Western culture whose inception and rapid subsequent blossoming can be traced to the years preceding World War II, the troubled Thirties.

Its roots, of course, hail back to the dawn of Western philosophy and the paradigm of Socratic dialogues. Its hardy strain continues through the centuries, surfaces in the 19th century with the troubled Dane Soren Kierkegaard, finds muscle with the Germans Heidegger, Metzsche and Karl Jaspers, bursts into the limelight in France during the mid-century decades, headed by a debonair pundit, Jean-Paul Sartre, a formidable female figure, Simone de Beauvoir, surrounded by notables such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Albert Camus and André Malraux.

It is our contention that the existential vision provides educators with a sound paradigm needed to establish a theoretical construct for explaining reality through a feminist vision.

The first step is to deal forthwith with the currently mightiest obstacle standing in our way and swing the wrecking ball in the direction of great piles of stone before which our cultures worship. I am talking about myths and mythology, especially female mythology.

The condition of women is weighted down by the existence of powerful, durable myths.

The word deserves some scrutiny since within the term lie the major molds which lured women from generation to generation, into beguiling but deadly traps.

Some myths have been anchor points to the human venture: the myth of Prometheus, of Sisyphus. They embody profound aspirations of our soul: revolt, hope, the pursuit of knowledge and happiness.

Myths dealing with women have no such universal value. They enclose the female in a strait jacket and supply her with the all too alluring security of the ready-made.

The unmasking of the trickery and deceit at the core of familiar myths, trivialized by deep-rooted acceptance, is an exercise which can be performed in many disciplines, perchance all.

But how we cling to our myths! The relation between myth and culture is well spelled out by Kristen Ann Amundsen in her book, The Silenced Majority:

> "...to discover the function of a myth, we have to explore the social reality portrayed by it, for myths serve to conceal, to soften, and to rationalize our actual social relationships--to make them more bearable, as it were, both for those on the outs and for those favored in any common situation. Particularly when the reality is rather hard to bear, when the power relationships conflict with cherished principles of justice and fairness, when the victimization of fellow humans is too obvious and crude, myths are fostered and take hold among people. One might say, then, that myths serve us all well--except that, as they obscure reality, they get in the way of needed change."

The word MYTH must be used with caution and in its broadest sense: an aggregate of collective and anonymous reactions that express, over and above a multiplicity of individual experiences, a seemingly constant truth. Sartre defines it as "all at once the expression of affective reactions and the symbolic product of an individual and historical situation."

The human mind seems inclined to the creation of myths. Our fables and legends have fostered them for centuries. They have escaped scientific measurements: polls, surveys, statistics, other quantitative instruments. They have flourished outside the study of the ethnologist, the anthropologist, the sociologist. Femimine myths fostered by literature of popular imagination, i.e., the siren, the enchantress, the mother-in-law, Carmen, Mimi, Lysistrata, link the human community with a fantasy world out of which are born the dreams of our nights and the torments of our days, sources of our creations. Simone de Beauvoir, who condemns myths as snares and disguises, still says in The Second Sex: "There is no feminine figure--virgin, mother, wife, sister, servant, mistress, smiling odalisque--that does not in some way summarize the ever-changing aspirations of man."

Western civilization and its literature have handed down to us throughout the centuries a series of images, concepts, revelations of women, which have gradually risen from long successions of living realities encased, so to speak, in parables and metaphors.

The existential view aided and abetted the irreversible mutation that took place in 20th century letters, repositories of our culture: the break with the oppressive, all-pervading myth of Tristan and Isolde that had rigidly cast woman in the role of the one through whom passion happens. It would be too long to show how literature, the mirror

of our civilization, narrowed down the portrait of woman to a description of the powers of passion. In spite of that, the romance of Tristan and Isolde and the myth of courtly love with its ramifications, its transformations, and its progeny cover every figure of woman in literature and art.

Alongside the Myth of Iseult the Fair and its absolutes of love and fidelity grew the myth of fickleness. Woman is then portrayed as a moment's diversion. The notion of multiplicity replaces that of unity and is expressed in the ideal in reverse: ribaldry.

This singular bond between the written word and women is not indissoluble. At the turn of the century, the interest is displaced. Recounting amorous adventures is less fascinating than probing the problems of the world. A glance at titles shows the new orientation. Gone are Pamela, Anna Karenina, Madame Bovary. Instead the list goes: In Search of Time Lost, For Whom the Bell Tolls, and the title that sums up all, Malraux' The Human Condition (1932), which precedes by a few years Sartre's Nausea (1938). Authors move into the controversial form: metaphysical literature, and Beauvoir declares that the metaphysical novel "honestly read, honestly written, brings an unveiling of existence unequalled by any other mode of expression." And Albert Camus similarly states: "The objective of art, in spite of the regrets of the pastiche-makers, has extended from psychology to the study of man's fate." Sartre speaks for all of them: "Our age has made us thus... we all are metaphysical writers."

The cloth out of which the daughters of Isolde are cut is further modified when a new notion moves to the foreground of existential writings: that of commitment (engagement) born from the writers' ties with their times.

Sartre and Beauvoir emphasized the importance of the political and social testimony of their works in the first issue of Les Temps Modernes: "The writer is en situation in his age: each one of his words echoes loudly... our intention is to participate in the occurrence and development of changes in the society that surrounds us." Women are a part of the "one indivisible reality, human reality."

Having set these general premises, we will now define the tenets of existentialism applicable to a framework for feminist pedagogy in general and curricular approaches in particular.

Contemporary existential writers, following the predictable cycle of a compensation mechanism, were part of a counter-movement that reacted against philosophy of essences, of universal truths handed to us through the lineage of Plato's heirs.

Its mottoes are interiority and subjectivity. Its first step is to "examine the life of the existent in its intensity and its responsibilities" (Emmanuel Mounier). It moves away from a philosophy of essence, immutable essences. The themes of existentialism are a passion for freedom, the notions of choice and decision, the notions of nothingness or non-being, settings for anguish and dereliction, the themes of commitment, of the Other and the on-going alienation between beings.

These elements point to a certain notion of woman that we will briefly outline:

There is an ontological (fundamental) basis common to all beings: there is also a biological, physiological contingency that is unavoidable, a "given," our sexuality.

Our sexuality is not a matter of nature but of situation. There is no "essence of femininity," no feminine nature. "It is not nature that defines woman, it is woman who defines herself by reassuming nature on her own, in her affectivity," says Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex. Sexuality is not an irreductible datum, declares existentialism; it is preceded by "an original search for being."

Unacceptable, as I said, is the notion of feminine nature, made of tenderness, intuition, compassion, sensitivity. The basic ontology of the human person is grounded in other fundamental data:

a) the subject-object relation, the perception of the other and the interaction of two beings;

b) choice and decision in the context of freedom and responsibility.

Our human condition, not "nature," mind you (the word nature being banned from the existential glossary), is situated for woman partly in a physiological contingency, a complex biological apparatus, partly in cultural pressures and structures of considerable magnitude.

The existential perspective infers for the person viewing reality a stance that defines the human project as common to all existence and de-mystifies our dominant cultural patterns.

One thing remains steadfast: our roles in life are to be freely assumed, they do not have a character of inevitability, they lie ahead of us as options to select, live and realize.

The old paradigm must be broken and discarded for the new one: every involvement is a possible into which we enter by an act of our own making.

Think of what this does to an approach to anthropology, psychology, geography (human geography, that is).

We will take a closer look at this paradigm and its two chief components: the notion of the Other, and the notion of freedom.

First, the question of our relations with others, or more philosophically stated, with the Other, occupies a large portion of Sartre's Being and Nothingness and is tightly woven into the fabric of The Second Sex.

The primary ontological structure, common to both sexes, is the foundation of the problem of the existence of others, the problem of "my relationship, as a being, with the being of others."

Here, summed up, is the theory.

I seize the reality of the Other by a cogito, a pre-ontological comprehension which could be expressed in the words videor ergo sum: I am seen, therefore, I am, I exist. The Other is at first the one I see, the Other-as-object, and also, conversely, the Other-as-subject, who in turn sees me as an object. I am, the Other is, we both are, as a "being-seen." A look penetrates me and I become that Being-for-other of which I am no longer the master. The Other has deprived me of my freedom.

How can I react to this invasion, this seizure? By freezing the Other as an object. Indeed, in Sartre's words, "while I am attempting to free myself from the Other's hold on me, he is trying to free himself from mine; while I am seeking to enslave the Other, the Other is seeking to enslave me.... Conflict is the original meaning of Being-for-others."

All our relations with others are to be envisaged in the perspective of conflict. Also, they are never unilateral and fixed, but reciprocal and unstable.

The for-itself and its complement, the in-itself, are two key words in the existential philosophical vocabulary. Without going into details, we could say that the in-itself is just there and exists independently from us. The for-itself is what projects itself, causing an upheaval of the in-itself, toward its goals. We are not yet what we will be and no longer what we are. This upsurge of the for-itself is "the absolute event which crowns the individual venture which is the existence of the self" (Sartre). It is the existential leap, performed in anguish, solitude and freedom.

Our avenues of communication with others are controlled by two complex instruments of limited reliability: the Look and Language.

For Sartre, as he explains it in the section of Being and Nothingness devoted to The Existence of Others, the look is a fundamental modality of the Other's presence to me: the emergence of the Other in the field of perception. We never know what the Other sees. The Other conjures up, within a given situation, an aspect of myself which I do not control, which is the Other's alone. The Other's look disintegrates me. This aspect of myself escapes from me, a portion of my world is stolen away from me, and I am left with "an invisible flight toward a new object." The emergence of the Other triggers, therefore, a gliding away of the whole universe, a decentralization of my world that undermines the centralization I am operating within me at the same time. The look of the Other brings me into being a second time, beyond my being in this world (mine), it causes an "internal bleeding," a drain toward the Other.

It may eventually lead to possessiveness when the Other establishes a claim on me, and from there on to the destruction of one of the partners.

Supplementing the look, as a means of communication, is language. "The emergence of the Other confronting me as a look causes the upsurge of language as the condition of my being." By language, existentialism means all the phenomena of expression and communication, not only the articulate word. The weaknesses and shortcomings of these phenomena are evident. Says Sartre: "I proceed blindly... I cannot even conceive what effect my gestures and attitudes will have, since they will always be taken up and founded by a freedom that will surpass them, dominate them.... Thus the 'meaning' of my expression always escapes me. I never know exactly if I signify what I wish to signify." Communication is invariably accompanied by an act of thievery, of banditry, of mutilation perpetrated on thought.

For existential writers, the importance of language is second to none. Words are powerful, fraught with primordial wisdom, says Heidegger, and with a near-magical virtue, according to Sartre.

That Sartre should have called the first volume of his autobiography The Words is revealing enough of the emphasis put upon the function of "naming." Human beings are handling tools "as murderous as a gas chamber," weapons as lethal as "loaded pistols." Forcefully said by Suzanne K. Langer, "the notion of giving something a NAME is the vastest generative ideas that ever was conceived" (Philosophy in a New Key, as quoted, again, by Yvette Oldendorf).

And now to define what is a subject. Beauvoir defines the term and, at the same time, contrasts the state of subject to that of object. In order to be a subject, one asserts oneself through projects that express transcendence. Transcendence is the constant surpassing or outstretching

of a freedom reaching out toward new freedoms. "There is no justification for a current existence other than its expansion toward a future indefinitely open. Each time transcendence falls back into immanence, there is a degrading of existence into 'in-itself,' of freedom into facticity." So speaks Beauvoir in The Second Sex. By facticity is meant what merely happens, what has not been chosen and is only a situation, a contingency. (It is the contingency of things, of the in-itself, which, without the upsurge of transcendence, is congealed into immobility, immanence, stagnation, and is an object.) I am never object to myself when I exist. However, I can make myself an object, in a punitive act, for example.

Woman is, therefore, ontologically, inasmuch as she is a human consciousness, a subject, but in the choice and decision of her concrete existence she may become an object. When she chooses to be the Other, the one which has been created by a subject other than herself, she confines herself to being an object. "The drama of woman is played in the conflict between the fundamental claim of every subject to set itself up as essential, and the demands of her situation," says Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex. Each time she wears the features that others have chosen for her, she constitutes herself a prisoner and objectifies herself. When she chooses herself by herself, she asserts herself as a free subject, and the problem becomes one of values.

In summary: 1) I exist myself as a subject; 2) my self is utilized and known by the Other; the Other appears to me as a subject to whom I am an object. Such is the setting for a dangerous game of attacks and counter-attacks.

Thus, the somber colors of any project endeavoring a unification of any kind between a pair of human beings in any relation: friendship, parenthood, professionalism, and so forth.

The project can be successful in the rare cases of an act of pure generosity. "I am wanted by a free want, I freely accept the want."

"I am because I am lavishly giving myself away untiringly in an overflow of generosity toward the tireless want that the Other freely makes himself be... instead of feeling de trop. I now feel that my own existence is taken up and willed in every tiny detail by a complete freedom that I am at the same time controlling and willing with my own freedom. This is the basis of the joy of loving when it exists: we feel we are justified in existing."

These ideas can become normative in every type of association: sibling, student-teacher, employer-employee, parent-child, love, friendship.

The theme of freedom is so obviously connected with any assessment of woman that talking about it has become embarrassingly trite. Freedom also happens to be at the very core of existential thought. As a matter of fact, existentialism has been defined around that term: "Dreadful Freedom" (Iris Murdoch, To Freedom Condemned, Justus Streller, to name two).

What is special to existential-style freedom?

Freedom is a given; our ontological make-up includes freedom, which is the very texture of the for-itself.

One point should be clarified here.

The freedom to choose, or freedom of choice, is one thing. Free choice is completely another one. Freedom of choice or to choose is the absence of restrictions to choose between several options. It could be called outer freedom, democracy, liberal institutions. It includes

the special concerns of the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union). On the other side, a free choice is accomplished from a position of inner freedom. Inner freedom can exist in an environment devoid of outer freedom: in a jail, a concentration camp, a fascist state, a police state. Sister Teresa enjoys it in India; Marilyn Monroe, rich and beautiful, lacked in in the United States.

I. How is inner freedom secured?

-by assuming sole and total responsibility for one's acts: anguish (inner), or fear (outer)

-by performing as a subject: one who moves and progresses, and grows on one's own terms

-by existing on a level of continuous self-assessment, re-evaluation, insecurity and risk

II. Infringements on free choice, on a free act, are:

-the pressure of facticity and contingency (cultures, traditions, convention, customs)

-cheating: excuses, alibis, self-deceit; passivity: object, immobility, immanence

-Others: engaging in relationships where two subjects are not involved; making an object of another being: entering an executioner/victim relation

We will be talking here of inner freedom, the one constantly threatened by our worst enemy, ourself, the one preyed upon by our own demons.

Not only must freedom be reassessed continuously, lest it slips away from us as we settle into our comfortable ruts or construct an array of alibis to justify our options, but, since limitless freedom is a contradiction of terms, it must be gauged in terms of the realization of the consequences of our acts and of our solidarity with human beings.

PART II

This system of thought can be used to structure several types of courses. Let me quickly run through a list that would take a volume to spell out and, for each of us, some time to realize to our full satisfaction.

In each discipline, the instructor can take into account the existential format: a) in the syllabus, b) in the conduct of the class: teacher/student relation, c) in advising and counseling.

In the social sciences, the most obvious and attractive model is a study of biographies selected throughout the centuries and the world. To give a few examples, here is a sample of what I have seen:

in Literature:	Anais Nin Gertrude Stein Julie de Lespinasse
in Art:	Isadora Duncan women sculptors: Louise Nevelson Germaine Richier
in Politics:	Shirley Chisholm Barbara Jordan
in Films:	the Hollywood stars

One of the more satisfying patterns is the personal biography generated by a student, involving research on a genealogy of women in one's family (mother, grandmother, daughter) and a control group: the family across the street. This is a tremendous form of personal assessment of values, of one's intellectual, emotional, ethical growth.

Anthropology is an ideal ground for the study of the changing roles of women with a focus on the word "roles" which increasingly appear as options, as possibles rather than given.

In biology, the responsibility is heavy because of recent research in genetics without which our understanding of our sexuality is flawed. The attitudes of the researcher are as crucial as the area itself. As Mark Davis explains, speaking for the sciences (Macalester, Spring 1983), the science faculty is facing what is known as the "hidden curriculum." Davis says: "I believe there is not much we can do with our curriculum to make our female students feel more at home in our disciplines. However, I do believe there is still much we can do with respect to our 'hidden curriculum,' which exists in our departments as in all departments. I am referring to the manner in which students are treated by their professors. If the ideas and/or professional aspirations of female students are taken less seriously than those of male students, then clearly we have failed to create an academic environment which encourages and supports male and female students equally. Moreover, if the majority of seminar and class speakers we invite are men, then we are failing to show our women students that their career goals are realistic and viable choices. In this light, the scarcity of women faculty members in the sciences remains a problem."

In history, the shift from political to social history is a step in the right direction.

In economics, there is a natural slot for the study of women in the labor force. Kathleen Newland and Evelyn Sullerot have done enormous work in that area. The study of the dynamics of female labor from an existential stance moves the researcher beyond the stage of raw statistics.

In education, the job is immense. Various tracks could include the training of a new kind of teacher or the revision of textbooks.

My expertise obviously stops short of advising disciplines on how to handle their course offerings. The person who comes closest to performing

this feat is Van Cleve Moris of the University of Chicago, in his book Existentialism in Education (Harper and Row, 1966). The most I can attempt to do is to indicate what the existential perspective, as I have explained it (a very selective interpretation), adds to the handling of data, and especially the handling of data dealing with the larger half of humankind; data that has been either ignored so far, or assessed in the light of an antiquated system of thought.

I can offer some illustrations taken from my own classroom experiences or from colleagues' experiences:

a) I have slotted a unit on existential philosophy in a variety of my courses in literature and civilization. At times when doing this, I have turned to the Philosophy or the Religious Studies Department for either a team-taught course, an exchange of lectures, which can inspire research papers into related topics: freedom, decision, choice, ethics, the latter being a great source of debates, rap sessions, group discussions.

b) Around the theme of the not-so-dutiful daughters (a variation on the title of Simone de Beauvoir's book The Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter), one can build a unit on the entrance of woman into adulthood, the passage from child to woman, the choices facing sexual involvement, the ties with peers, with previous generations, the relation with authority.

c) The subject of the pairing of consciousness can be studied within the parameters of the subject/object relation. The challenge of establishing successful "unions" in the broadest sense (with parents, siblings, friends, mentors, employers...) is a crucial question in the lives of young women and of all our youth, caught in the trying experience of establishing a privileged association with other individuals, working partners, lovers, be it in a short-lived or durable time frame.

d) The question of the family crops up everywhere. Many courses cover it in some manner. Parenting and marriage may not occupy center stage yet for many students, but they remain a preoccupation of youth. Every student I have known has been herself/himself through a crisis involving a parent or had a friend who did. The building blocks for family relations can be reviewed existentially.

e) Sexual preferences are an important issue. Existentially, everything is looked at in terms of a possible option, a project to be assumed in freedom. The self-discipline of assessing choices and sexual preferences through the existential prism is a significant step towards honesty and understanding.

f) Deviations and deteriorations are front issues that distress and confuse even a callous and blasé youth. Existential thought provides a criterion for stands in the controversial area of pornography and obscenity, for example, by using the subject-object paradigm.

Time is lacking to survey the complete set of areas that can be covered with existentialism as a starting point.

I have a last point to cover: some pedagogical practices that I have utilized along the years which seem particularly suited to courses dealing with women's issues approached from an existential stance:

1) A student-initiated type of class situation is appropriate for several reasons. Students must feel encouraged to look into themselves, to draw on personal experiences, to probe their own identity. A non-threatening atmosphere allows the students to express themselves and let thoughts, feelings surface. They will gain a sense of self-value. Avoid above all the passivity pattern; there has been enough of that.

2) Oral presentations are to be encouraged. They push the student into a position of responsibility and self-worth. The acknowledgement of the contribution spurs growth.

3) If possible, at least one appointment with each student should be scheduled. The instructor's attitude can never stress enough the importance of one person. The rallying phrase of the educator should be "every human person born into this world represents something that has never existed before" (Martin Buber). Discuss interests, background, reasons for taking the course, expectations....

4) The choice of a research paper must be monitored carefully. A full measure of freedom in the selection of the topic is desirable. I forever marvel at the inventiveness, creativity, initiative of students in their choice of a project that will best express what they are seeking in the course, what they are trying to discover about themselves, the world, society, both through self-probing and scholarly routes.

5) Carefully prepare bibliographies; ask for a log of readings. Encourage students to write down their reactions to the materials, rather than to compose summaries or digests. The principle remains the same: set the critical mind in motion.

6) Class discussions are an imperative, but they should have some structure. Assign students to the presentation of a segment, pass sign-up sheets to provide the class with some direction, urge students to unveil personal viewpoints, testimonials that depart from the text, rather than repeat it.

7) Visits by experts are helpful in a course that touches fields where the instructor is not specialized. Among these, a member of the Biology Department (a woman, if possible), or someone you can trust

to brief the class on current research on genetics, which is linked to the question of freedom, and on the biological foundation of human sexuality. We are not credible if we ignore scientific data in this age.

All these pedagogical suggestions have a common trait: while a course concerned with women's issues is not a consciousness-raising experience, it seeks to enlarge academically based knowledge about the self--and to foster the development, in an understanding and supportive atmosphere, of intellectual inquiry.

CONCLUSION

Feminist pedagogy for me means bringing an important paradigm shift in the minds of those engaged in the process of intellectual growth: the nurturers and the receivers. The goal is to keep adding new data, new hypotheses, deeper questions. An academic curriculum must be concerned with women's issues at the levels of both faculty and students. The normative pattern must posit woman as an essential member of the community. As for the teacher, she/he has a mandate to arrange the learning situation in such a way as to bring home to every individual the truth (the word has finally been let out of the bag) about two propositions:

1) I am a <u>choosing</u> agent unable to avoid choosing my way through life, free to move in compliance with my authentic project.

2) I am a <u>responsible</u> agent, accountable for my choices before the community of other freedoms on the basis of reciprocity and solidarity.

Then will women, liberated from myths, live in full partnership with the females and males of the world in projects that transcend the contingency of sex and gender.

The new perception of reality fostered by an existential feminist pedagogy will introduce the kind of social structures and systems that are appropriate to the human community. Both individualism, or the worship of the self, and collectivism, or the denial of the self to society, present pitfalls.

The true community we want to build through education stands on a living, mutual relation to one another, the I-Thou association of Martin Buber.

As we teach, and ourselves learn how to turn towards other living beings, sometimes in the course of painful confrontations, we help bring their and our lives into harmony with the scheme of things. Buber again: "All real living is meeting."